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STRATEGIC VALUE OF THE MEDITERRANEAN, NEAR AND MIDDLE EAST

AIDE MEMOIRE

The Mediterranean constitutes an avenue through which the military power of the United States and Great Britain can be projected deep into the great land mass of Europe and Asia and can, in a region remote from our countries, under relatively favourable conditions, counter aggression by a hostile power. The Near East is moreover an essential offensive base area for counter attack in the event of aggression which results in war.

[redacted] B-1 EA, ED

2. Unrestricted sea communications through the Mediterranean to the countries along its shores are essential to the restoration of their economy and ours, but their outstanding importance is in connection with access to the oil resources and potential base areas of the Near East and to the Far East through the Suez Canal. The oil resources of the Near East are essential for the peacetime economy of the western world and for the full development of its war potential.

3. Italy, Greece, Turkey and Persia form a strategic barrier against expansion by a hostile power into the Mediterranean and Near and Middle East. Because of their dominant strategic position as well as the political and ideological factors involved they are key areas in resistance to the spread of communism.

4. Of equal strategic importance are the approaches to the Near and Middle East. Although the question of Spain and the coast of Morocco and French North Africa are outside the scope of these diplomatic discussions, it is a strategic necessity to us that the western entrance of the Mediterranean should be open to us at all times.

5. Although the particular facilities we require vary from country to country the strategic importance of the whole area is indivisible and the strategic object is the same throughout. [redacted] B-1 EA ED

[redacted] The admission of hostile influence in peacetime will lead to the forfeiting of our economic interest, the severance of our communications and will seriously endanger our ability to hold the area in war.

[redacted] B-1 EA ED

7. In a matter of such strategic importance to both the United States and Great Britain, it is essential that neither foreign countries nor commercial interests, nor any other influence should be permitted to make capital for themselves by playing off one of our countries against the other.

8. In assessing our strategic requirements in each of the countries we have gone on the general principle that our joint position should be built up on the rights and influence which each of us already retains in these countries. There is no question of attempting to replace British by U.S. influence, or vice versa. What we require is an agreed policy designed to strengthen and improve our mutual position by lending each other all possible influence and support.

9. We set out in the Annex a brief summary of our agreed strategic requirements in the various countries of Southern Europe and the Near East and the aims which from the military point of view we recommend should be pursued.

16th October, 1947.

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DEPARTMENT OF STATE A/CDC/MR
REVIEWED BY WWOLFJR DATE 6/1/82
PORTIONS DENIED AS INDICATED

ANNEX

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ITALY AND THE ITALIAN COLONIES

ITALY

It is an agreed strategic requirement that Italy should not fall under communist influence. The free passage of the Mediterranean depends upon our control of certain key points, including Sicily.

In our view, therefore, Italy should receive the fullest practicable economic, political and military support from the United States and Great Britain.

[redacted]

TRIPOLITANIA AND CYRENAICA

2. From the military point of view there is advantage in considering Tripolitania and Cyrenaica as two parts of a single geographical unit, namely Libya.

[redacted]

3. Our first strategic requirement in the area is that it should not in any way fall under foreign influence or domination.

[redacted]

paragraph above.

ERITREA

4. Our agreed strategic requirement in Eritrea is that it should not on any account fall under the domination of some potentially hostile power or become the centre of trouble.

[redacted]

ITALIAN SOMALILAND

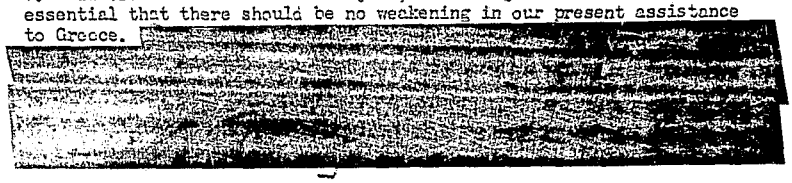
5. Our agreed strategic requirement is that Italian Somaliland should not fall under the domination or influence of a potentially hostile power.

[redacted]

GREECE

6. The strategic importance of Greece is such that if she lost her independent status, not only would our communications in the Mediterranean be threatened but the whole strategic position in the Eastern Mediterranean and Near East would be altered to our disadvantage, particularly because of the danger that Turkey and Italy would be influenced accordingly. Our object, therefore, should be to preserve her independence.

7. In order to achieve this object, we are agreed that it is essential that there should be no weakening in our present assistance to Greece.



B-1 EA ED

TURKEY

8. In war Turkey presents a natural barrier to an advance by a hostile Power to the Eastern Mediterranean and Near East countries, Palestine in particular. In peace Turkey holds a key position with respect both to the Near East and to the Arab World generally. If Turkey loses her independence in peace, our ability to defend the Near East in war will be gravely prejudiced.

9. We are agreed, therefore, that we should do all in our power to retain and improve this great military asset - the continued independence, integrity and strength of Turkey. We are agreed that the financial credit provided by the U.S. Government for the better equipment of Turkish forces and for the improvement of communications in Turkey, is an essential step towards the achievement of our strategic aims. We should continue to give all assistance we can to the training and organisation of Turkish forces on modern lines.

EGYPT

10. We are agreed that since Egypt is the political and geographical centre of the Near East and the hub of communications, it is therefore the natural base for land and air forces operating in the whole of the Near East area.

11. The present position is that the British Government are standing upon the terms of the 1936 treaty, and they are not prepared to waive their rights under it until they are assured of a satisfactory alternative arrangement.

12. We are agreed that the following are our minimum strategic requirements in Egypt in peace to enable us to maintain a firm hold on the Near East in war :-

(a) Base Organisation - to maintain a nucleus operational and administrative base organisation capable of rapid expansion at the beginning of a war.

(b) Right of re-entry - to have the certainty of rapid re-entry into Egypt including the Canal Zone on the imminent threat of war, and to have discretion to decide when such a state exists.

(c) Air defence and airfield requirements - to be able to operate offensive and defensive air forces from Egypt at the very outset of a war.

(d) Naval operational requirements - to have the right to operate our naval forces from the outset of a war from Egyptian ports.

(e) Communications - to maintain and use the necessary facilities for our communications, including transit rights for military aircraft.

13. The above requirements do not necessarily include the physical presence in Egypt, in peacetime, of U.S. or British operational units. We agree, however, that it will be essential for our facilities outlined above to be maintained by trained military personnel.

14. We agree that the personnel who will be needed to maintain our facilities may be either American or British, and that whatever facilities are obtained should be equally available in war to either of our armed forces.

15. We appreciate the difficulties which will be met in persuading the Egyptians to grant these minimum facilities to the British and we believe that they may best be persuaded to do so if they realise that American and British intentions in the Near East are as one, and if American influence is exerted upon them. For example, we suggest that American acceptance of the recent Egyptian request for an American Mission should be made conditional upon Egyptian agreement to grant the British the strategic facilities which we believe are essential for our common purpose, including a satisfactory settlement of the Sudan question.

SUDAN

16. It is strategically important that the British should retain freedom of action in the Sudan, particularly with regard to air and ground transit rights and the use of certain port facilities.

[redacted] B-1 EA ED

[redacted] B-1 EA ED

PALESTINE

19. Palestine is strategically of the greatest importance to us. It is essential to the defence of Egypt and it contains oil refineries and pipeline terminals necessary for our wartime potential.

20. While it is perhaps inopportune to define our exact strategic requirements while the Palestine question is the subject of open debate in the United Nations, we are agreed upon two general military principles which in our view should govern the solution :-

(a) No solution is acceptable which allows Soviet influence of any kind in Palestine.

(b) The only kind of solution which from a military point of view is acceptable is one which does not alienate Arab goodwill to the United States and Great Britain.

TRANSJORDAN

21. We are agreed that the present position in Transjordan is satisfactory and that our strategic requirements are adequately assured by the existing Anglo-Transjordan Treaty of 1946.

[redacted] B-1 EA ED

IRAQ

23. The existing Anglo-Iraq Treaty of 1930 provides us with the strategic facilities which we require at the present. It has, however, become necessary for the British to negotiate a revised treaty.

24. We are agreed that our joint strategic policy in Iraq must aim at securing the following facilities in the revised treaty.

(a) Arrangements for the entry of British forces into Iraq on the threat of war.

(b) The maintenance and development of the operational airfields and other base facilities which we shall require in war.

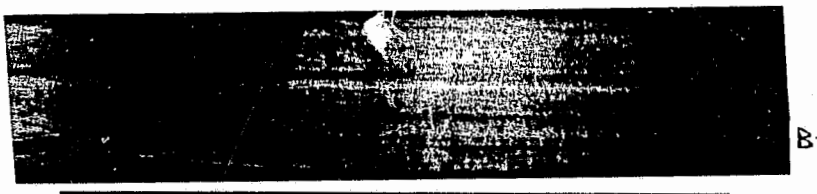
(c) The grant of such facilities as are necessary for our communications in peace, including air bases at Habbaniya and Shaiba.

(d) Unrestricted ability in peace to retain oil supplies and build up stocks.

25. We think that the attainment of these facilities in the revised Anglo-Iraq treaty could well be assisted if the Iraqis realise that Britain is fully supported by the United States.

[redacted]

B-1 EA 5D



B-1 EA 5D

PERSIA

29. The value of Persia to us both strategically and as a rich centre of oil supply, cannot be too strongly stated, and it is of the utmost importance that Persia should resist foreign attempts at domination and retain her independence.